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## Police find boy dead in house with suspected meth lab

July 10, 2007

BY AMBER HUNT and STEVE NEAVLING

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Police thought they were heading out to help an injured toddler.

But when they arrived, the boy was dead and they saw signs his parents were cooking methamphetamines inside the home.

That was the scene Monday afternoon in Sterling Heights, where police said they discovered the boy, about 18 months old, dead inside a home in the 42000 block of Betley.

How the boy died isn't clear. Macomb County Medical Examiner Daniel Spitz said he would begin the autopsy this morning.

"We found some precursors that indicated they might be making meth," said Sterling Heights Police Chief Dave Vinson.

Among the items found was muriatic acid, he said, a highly toxic chemical.

The boy lived with his parents and 5-year-old sister, Vinson said. Police would not identify the family.

The mother, who called 911 to report that her son was sick, was taken into custody on an unrelated drunken-driving warrant. The father is not in custody.

Vinson said the couple's daughter is with her grandparents. A social worker has been assigned to the case.

Neighbors said they often saw the light-haired toddler waddling across the front yard as his mother watched.

"He'd just learned to walk," said Loretta Scriver, 69, who lives across the street from the family on the tree-lined street where children regularly ride their bicycles and run from one friend's house to another.

Contact **AMBER HUNT** at 313-222-2708.

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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Baby Dead In Home With Signs Of Meth Lab

POSTED: 7:41 am EDT July 10, 2007  
UPDATED: 9:59 am EDT July 10, 2007

**STERLING HEIGHTS, Mich.** -- An 18-month-old baby was found dead inside a home where there were signs of a methamphetamine lab, police said.

The boy's mother called 911 Monday afternoon to report that her son was sick and unresponsive in their Sterling Heights home.

Police said they discovered the toddler dead as well as items such as muriatic acid, a highly toxic chemical.

"We found some precursors that indicated they might be making meth," Sterling Heights Police Chief Dave Vinson said.

Police and hazardous materials team investigated the scene Monday night and posted a sign on the door that said "Do not enter, hazardous chemicals used for illegal drugs inside."

A neighbor who did not want to be identified explained what the mother did right after she found the boy, "She had the baby in one arm, with a cell phone in the other. She was screaming."

"Right now, the case is under active investigation. We are looking at all possibilities," said Vinson.

An autopsy is expected to take place Tuesday.

The mother was taken into custody on an unrelated drunken-driving warrant, and the father is not in custody.

Police did not identify the family.

Both parents are expected to be face drug charges.

Authorities said the couple's 5-year-old daughter is with her grandparents, and a social worker has been assigned to the case.

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July 10, 2007

## Mom accused of hiding drugs in kids' diapers withdraws guilty plea

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

**MOUNT CLEMENS** -- The second defendant in the case of the Clinton Township couple accused of hiding drugs in candy wrappers and cocaine in their children's diapers withdrew her plea and will go to trial.

Tanya Humphreys, who pleaded no contest in May to six drug counts and one count of second-degree child abuse for keeping the drugs near the five children she and Marvin Blocker had, withdrew her plea Monday before Macomb County Circuit Court Judge Edward Servitto.

"When she pled, she was under the understanding that she would receive a certain sentence," said defense attorney Richard Glanda. "I wasn't present when the plea was made."

Both Blocker and Humphreys withdrew their pleas at their sentencing before Servitto.

Blocker withdrew his plea June 27 and fired his lawyer. Humphreys was to be sentenced the same day, but as she waited for her attorney to arrive she collapsed.

The Clinton Township couple will both stand trial on Aug. 1.

"She wants a trial, she is getting a trial," Servitto said. "There is no firing your lawyer at this point."

The couple was arrested after a Jan. 31 raid on their Clinton Township home. Officers found crack cocaine, marijuana, Ecstasy and prescription drugs in the trailer, all within reach of the five children. Baby food jars were also found that were used to cook crack cocaine and a Sweet Tart candy bag filled with 50 Ecstasy pills.

The children are now living with Blocker's parents.

"We will have our day in court and she will have her day in court," said William Dailey, chief of the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office drug unit.

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## Courts

# Litigation long overdue, says head of foster parents group

01:00 AM EDT on Sunday, July 1, 2007

By Edward Fitzpatrick

Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — The state began to fail “David T.” as soon as he entered foster care at age 2, according to a federal civil-rights lawsuit filed by the state child advocate last week.

Despite “clear indications” that David had been sexually abused while in his mother’s care, the state Department of Children, Youth and Families failed to ensure he received a sexual-abuse evaluation or appropriate treatment, the suit claims.

The state did find a foster mother for David, and he grew extremely close to “Mommy Mary” over the next two years. But when she was unable to continue caring for him, the state sent David to a shelter at age 4.

After three months in the shelter, David was sent to Michigan to live with an aunt who expressed interest in adopting him. But the aunt ran into “housing problems and other difficulties,” and the state ended up bringing David back to the shelter.

“When he arrived there, he refused to get out of the car and pleaded with the caseworker to bring him back to ‘Mommy Mary,’ ” the suit states. “Shelter staff approached the car and told 4-year-old David, ‘The rules here have not changed.’ David silently got out of the care and walked into the shelter.”

He would never live in a home again.

David is one of 10 young plaintiffs whose pseudonyms are on the U.S. District Court lawsuit that State Child Advocate Jametta O. Alston filed against Governor Carcieri and other state officials Thursday. Alston is pursuing class-action status on behalf of the 3,000 children now in state custody, and the litigation is backed by a national watchdog group called Children’s Rights.

Carcieri issued a news release Friday, saying he was “extremely concerned” about the allegations but that some of the information in the lawsuit “may be outdated and fails to take into account the reforms that have been made under Department of Children, Youth and Families Director Patricia Martinez.” Carcieri said the state has given DCYF caseworkers greater flexibility in work schedules and is in the process of hiring 10 new caseworkers.

Martinez, who is named as a defendant, said Friday that the state may pursue criminal charges and other disciplinary action against any state workers, foster parents and foster homes that failed to protect children from the abuse alleged in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says another aunt expressed interest in caring for David, but DCYF failed to pursue that option, and his “emotional state” kept declining. When he was 6, the state put David in a psychiatric hospital for five months and then sent him to a residential treatment facility, where he was sexually abused by a roommate and began to wet his bed almost every night, the suit states.

In 2003, David was moved to another institution, where he was restrained by staff members 105 times over a three-

month period. He stayed there three years, and, at age 10, the state declared David “too damaged for placement.”

The state did allow adoption recruitment staff to meet David in 2004, eight years after it registered him for adoption, but officials decided adoption would be inappropriate for him. In 2006, David moved to an out-of-state treatment facility where he “engaged in sexual self-mutilation” and gained more than 50 pounds.

Today, at age 13, David lives in an institution in Massachusetts, where he has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, mild mental retardation and “environmental influences, including his history of neglect and his multiple placements,” the suit states.

“David entered care when he was only 2 years old, and finding him a permanent, loving family was completely feasible,” the lawsuit says. Instead, “As a direct result of defendants’ actions and inactions, David has been and continues to be irreparably harmed.”

LISA GUILLETTE, executive director of the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, said she cried while reading about David and the other foster children in the lawsuit.

“The summaries of the named plaintiffs and the types of failures they document are, to me, indicative of a systemic breakdown,” she said. “While we don’t usually see cases that horrible, we have seen a breakdown in staffing and oversight that could lead to those conditions.”

The lawsuit begins by recounting how a 3-year-old boy, Thomas “T.J.” Wright, was beaten to death in a foster home in Woonsocket in 2004. Guillette said, “I don’t want to see another T.J. Wright. I don’t want to see another child die, and we are in danger of that.”

The litigation is “long overdue,” Guillette said, praising Alston for being “courageous” enough to sue the governor who appointed her.

Guillette said the system’s problems have been developing over the course of successive administrations, and the goal of the litigation is to find solutions — not to point fingers. But, she said, the crisis has been mounting for years and it seemed to grow worse during this year’s budget crisis as the General Assembly cut funds and Carcieri talked about laying off 1,000 state workers. “We are not moving in the direction of solving problems,” she said.

“If people are outraged by this,” Guillette said, “they bear some responsibility because these are all our kids. We need people who are willing to serve as foster parents or as mentors or as CASA [Court Appointed Special Advocate] volunteers.”

Guillette’s association has a state contract to support foster parents and help them navigate the DCYF system. “We try to defend our work, but at some point the breakdowns in our system are not defensible,” she said.

THE LAWSUIT CITES data collected from states by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, saying that in five of the six years between 2000 and 2005, Rhode Island had “the single highest rate of substantiated child abuse or neglect occurring to children in foster care among all states that reported data.” And those rates “far exceeded benchmarks set by the federal government.”

In the 2004 federal fiscal year, 1.32 percent of foster children in Rhode Island were maltreated, which was twice the federal benchmark of 0.57 percent. In federal fiscal year 2005, the rate of maltreatment in Rhode Island rose to 1.59 percent, the suit says, and since then the federal benchmark has fallen to 0.32 percent.

Those numbers had apparently never been widely reported before in Rhode Island, but state officials certainly were aware of them because they provided the data to the federal government, said Susan Lambiase, associate director of Children’s Rights, a nonprofit legal organization based in New York City.

Lambiase noted Rhode Island’s abuse and neglect rates were so high that children in state foster care were more likely to be maltreated than children in the general population. “It’s outrageous,” she said. “They are getting removed from

their parents because the state is saying their parents are unable to care for them, and then the state is even less able to care for them and is damaging them worse.”

The suit attributes that abuse and neglect to a variety of shortcomings in the child-welfare system. For example, the suit says, “DCYF assigns such large caseloads to its social workers that they are unable to make the regular face-to-face visits to plaintiff children that are essential to ensuring that these children are safe.”

Last year, Alston, the state child advocate, issued a report saying DCYF had failed to make some of the most important changes that a review panel called for after T.J. Wright’s death. Most significantly, she said the state had failed to hold caseloads to the recommended average of 14 families per caseworker. At that time, caseloads stood as high as 20.04 families per caseworker in the region of the state where T.J. died.

On Friday, Alston said the most recent figures from a couple of weeks ago show caseloads are still averaging 18 to 25 families, and she emphasized that families often have more than one child.

The lawsuit cited other problems, saying, “DCYF has so few foster homes that it places children in homes without licenses, depriving them of basic protections of foster parent background checks and training.” And, the suit says, “Instead of appropriately investigating and addressing abuse or neglect in foster placements, DCYF continues to rely on foster care settings known to pose a risk of harm to children.”

Guillette said the state could help retain and recruit foster parents by increasing payments for the room and board of foster children. She said Rhode Island’s “foster care board rates” are \$14.39 per day for children from birth through age 3; \$13.64 per day for age 4 to 11; and \$15.79 per day for age 12 and above. By comparison, the rates in Massachusetts are \$17.10, \$17.96 and \$18.59, and the rates in Connecticut are \$24.85, \$25.22 and \$27.42, she said.

Each year, a bill is introduced to raise the rates in Rhode Island, and each year the bill dies in committee, Guillette said.

Guillette said those payments cover just a portion of child-care expenses, so people don’t get into foster care to “make a quick dime.” But increasing the rates would be especially helpful in retaining foster parents related to the children they care for, she said, citing the example of “a grandmother who’s retired, on fixed income, and her daughter develops a drug problem and she needs to step up to the plate to care for her grandchild.”

Lambiase, of Children’s Rights, said, “The bottom line is these are the most vulnerable, underprivileged children in your state. They don’t vote. They don’t have a strong, powerful lobby to protect their interests. They don’t even have their parents. The state is their parents, and the state is failing them.”

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## Donation puts Macomb County over funding goal for camp

July 9, 2007

BY STEVE NEAVLING

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Macomb County exceeded its goal of raising \$10,000 to send grandparents and the children they raise to a summer camp after the state cut funding.

Donations reached more than \$11,000 after a local businessman donated \$1,800 today.

The county needed the money by Friday for county residents to attend the weekend camping trip in Fenton.

For many of the families that want to go to Camp Copneconic, the trip is the only vacation they can afford all year.

The state cut funding because of its budget crunch.

The \$1,800 donation came from John Falk, owner of Falk-Kastelic-Heartwell Inc., an international manufacturing representative headquartered in Washington Township.

"It seems like something very worthwhile," Falk said in explaining why he donated.

Macomb officials began collecting money about a month ago, prompting donations from all over metro Detroit.

"We are so pleased that this year's camp has been saved, " said Dana Camphous-Peterson, vice-chairwoman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners, who helped champion the effort. "The generosity and support of this cause by our employees and the community is overwhelming; it goes to show the value we have for what these grandparents and kinship caregivers are doing."

An estimated 7,500 grandchildren live with 3,800 grandparents in the county.

Grandparents who care for their grandchildren save the foster care system about \$13,534 a year for each child, according to the county.

"We are all breathing a collective sigh of relief and gratitude," said Karen Bisdorf, deputy director of Macomb County Senior Citizen Services Department, of the donations today.

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July 10, 2007

## A State Finds No Easy Fixes on Health Care

By [KEVIN SACK](#)

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Gov. [Edward G. Rendell](#), an unapologetic big-city liberal who campaigned as a health care reformer, might have been expected to propose a plan to cover the 900,000 Pennsylvanians who are uninsured.

And he did so, after winning reelection last year in a landslide. But like other governors in the vanguard of health policy, Mr. Rendell also concluded that such a move would be unaffordable, and perhaps politically unattainable, without serious efforts to control costs.

As a result, Mr. Rendell's "Prescription for [Pennsylvania](#)" included a ban on [smoking](#) in public places, a reduction in the rate of hospitalization for chronic diseases and an expansion of the role nurses play in treating patients. He even framed his proposal to provide universal access as "a form of cost containment," emphasizing that 6.5 percent of every health-insurance premium in Pennsylvania went to subsidizing care for the uninsured, often in emergency rooms.

Mr. Rendell is learning, however, that to contain costs is eventually to pluck dollars from someone's pocket. His plan has incited protest from hospitals, doctors, insurers and small businesses, each of them finding something to detest.

[A contentious legislative budget session has led to a stalemate that put the fiscal plan 10 days overdue as of yesterday after the state furloughed some 25,000 workers and suspended many services. But lawmakers said the impasse was broken late last night.]

Mr. Rendell seems to be facing an uphill task. Once confident that his package would win quick approval, he now puts the odds of success at 50-50. Mr. Rendell says he is calling for shared sacrifice. "Everyone's ox gets gored a little bit in this," he said in an interview here. "If we're ever going to have accessible health insurance for all Americans, we have to begin by containing costs. If costs continue to spiral out of control, there is no way the government can afford to pay for it."

Other big-state governors who are leading a second wave of health care overhaul — after recent expansions of coverage in Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont — are also making strong comments about runaway costs, as are presidential candidates in both parties.

Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) of California, [a Republican](#), has emphasized in recent speeches that his plan to make insurance mandatory must be accompanied by stringent reductions in health care spending.

Like Mr. Rendell's plan, the Schwarzenegger one has run into opposition from doctors, hospitals and businesses that are upset about his proposals to tax their revenues.

In Illinois, Gov. [Rod R. Blagojevich](#), a Democrat, is selling his health care plan by forecasting that the savings generated by better management of chronic diseases and expanded use of electronic records will exceed the cost of extending coverage to 1.4 million adults. Mr. Blagojevich is trying to revive his plan after legislators rejected a proposal to pay for extended coverage with a tax on gross business receipts.

"The key is, Can you package the reforms to show what impact it's going to have on people with insurance so that you can motivate labor and big business?" said Kenneth E. Thorpe, a professor of health policy at [Emory University](#) who is advising Mr. Blagojevich. "In Illinois, we showed that every \$1 in state spending would yield \$2 in savings for people with private health insurance. That refocuses the debate."

In Pennsylvania, Mr. Rendell makes his case by explaining that insurance premiums increased by 76 percent from 2000 to 2006, six times the rise in median wages. A major cause, he argues, is the more than \$6 billion in unnecessary annual costs for the treatment of infections, injuries caused by medical errors and controllable chronic conditions like [diabetes](#), [asthma](#) and [heart disease](#).

Last year, Pennsylvania reported 19,154 cases of hospital-acquired infections in 2005, generating nearly 400,000 additional patient days in the hospital and \$3.5 billion in charges. The state recently detailed 175 hospital medical errors over a 30-month period, many of them classified as "wrong-site surgeries."

Mr. Rendell's plan would require hospitals to adopt hygiene practices that have reduced infection rates at several Pittsburgh hospitals, some as simple as more hand-washing. To manage chronic diseases more efficiently in a state with a large elderly population, the plan would give incentives to providers who encourage healthier lifestyles and closer attention to medications.

Mr. Rendell said he did not propose making insurance mandatory, as is the case in Massachusetts and in Mr. Schwarzenegger's plan, because he wanted first to drive down the cost of care. He said he had reasoned that unlike limiting reform to coverage of the uninsured, who make up about 7 percent of the state's population, a focus on cost control would appeal to every Pennsylvanian who visits a doctor or pays a premium. It could also win over business interests because of the impact of health costs on corporate bottom lines.

But hospitals are lobbying against his proposals to regulate expenditures for new construction and equipment and to cut off reimbursement payments when patient stays are extended because of medical mistakes and preventable infections. Doctors do not like his proposal to give more responsibility to physicians' assistants and nurse midwives.

Small-business owners are protesting his call for a "fair share assessment" — a 3 percent payroll tax on employers who do not offer insurance, with the proceeds dedicated to covering the uninsured. And insurers are working to defeat proposals that would prohibit consideration of preexisting medical conditions in rate-setting and require that at least 85 percent of premiums be spent on health care costs as opposed to administrative overhead.

The Senate remains in the hands of Republicans who side with hospital, insurance and business interests. In the House, Democrats are fighting to hold the single-seat majority they gained last November after 12 years in the minority. Neither chamber is in the mood to raise taxes, and Mr. Rendell's "fair share assessment" has won little support.

The governor has linked budget negotiations to some of his proposals, and the legislature is still considering them. But his broader plan has effectively been tabled until a fall session because of business opposition to the payroll tax.

"When small businesses don't offer coverage, it's not because they don't like their employees," said Gene Barr, vice president for the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry. "It's that they can't afford it. I've had e-mails and phone calls from small businesses saying, 'Look, if this goes in, I close.' "

In a state where 71 percent of the uninsured are employed, Mr. Rendell said it would be unfair for small businesses to not share in the pain. He said he hoped to persuade companies that provide insurance to persuade large corporations that do provide insurance to help apply pressure.

But he also said he would hold his nose and sign a bill that paid for expanded health care insurance through an alternate source if the legislature came up with one.

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Article published Jul 10, 2007

## Woman's green thumb at work for decades on garden

By Dan Meisler

**DAILY PRESS & ARGUS**

When Hazel Bostic moved into her Howell Township home in 1978, the backyard was nothing more than a hay field.

Nowadays, it's full of blooming garden beds, a pond, a swimming pool and several massive trees that she planted herself. Bostic's work will be part of the 2007 LACASA Garden Tour that takes place Saturday and Sunday. Proceeds will go to help LACASA provide services for survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse.

Having grown up on a farm in Ohio, Bostic said she's been gardening in her backyard "constantly for almost 30 years."

"I just love it," she said. "I Don't know why, but I just fell in love with it. It's a lot of work, but I really enjoy (it)."

Although Bostic gets help from her granddaughter, Korie Parent, love of gardening apparently doesn't run in the family.

Her husband, Dan, is too "clean and neat" to get into gardening, she said. While Parent is willing to help with watering, she doesn't like to do too much else — "It's gross and dirty," she said.

The Bostics are parents of Daily Press & Argus Editor-Niche Products Candy Spiegel, and Parent is her daughter.

Bostic said even her friends aren't gardeners, so she relishes the chance to show off her work during the garden tour, in which she also participated in 2000.

"It's so much fun for me to see people come and get excited," she said.

Her garden features a "water garden" surrounding a pond, in which frogs and goldfish live. She used to have larger fish, but a heron kept eating them.

There is also a type of grass that grows 15 feet tall each year. Bostic dries out the bamboo-like reeds and uses them as a fence of sorts.

Her garden might be the only one on the tour with Astroturf — she's converted her former vegetable garden into an ornamental garden and play area for her grandchildren. The artificial turf will be home to two miniature golf putting greens and a small croquet area.

Bostic said she still had a lot of cleanup to do before the tour starts, and said she thinks her garden is "middle-line" compared to the others in the event.

But that doesn't seem to have dampened her anticipation.

"It's so much fun," she said.

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